**Perspectives on the American Cowboy (1884, 1886)**

*In the 1870s and 1880s, most Americans held a negative view of the cowboys who worked on the range. Most people’s interactions with cowboys took place when cowboys came into town at the end of a long drive to blow off steam. The two accounts reproduced below present two different perspectives on cowboys. The first account, excerpted from Theodore Roosevelt’s autobiography, details Roosevelt’s conflict with a drunken cowboy who was shooting up a saloon. The second account, published in* Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, offers a positive description of cowboys.*

**Teddy Roosevelt, Cowboy, 1884**

The only time I ever had serious trouble was at an even more primitive little hotel than the one in question. It was also on an occasion when I was out after lost horses. Below the hotel had merely a bar-room, a dining-room, and a lean-to kitchen; above was a loft with fifteen or twenty beds in it. It was late in the evening when I reached the place. I heard one or two shots in the bar-room as I came up, and I disliked going in. But there was nowhere else to go, and it was a cold night. Inside the room were several men, who, including the bartender, were wearing the kind of smile worn by men who are making believe to like what they don't like. A shabby individual in a broad hat with a cocked gun in each hand was walking up and down the floor talking with strident profanity. He had evidently been shooting at the clock, which had two or three holes in it face.

He was not a "bad man" of the really dangerous type, the true man-killer type, but he was an objectionable creature, a would-be bad man, a bully who for the moment was having things all his own way. As soon as he saw me he hailed me as "Four eyes," in reference to my spectacles, and said, "Four eyes is going to treat." I joined in the laugh and got behind the stove and sat down, thinking to escape notice. He followed me, however, and though I tried to pass it off as a jest this merely made him more offensive, and he stood leaning over me, a gun in each hand, using very foul language. He was foolish to stand so near, and moreover, his heels were close together, so that his position was unstable. Accordingly, in response to his reiterated command that I should set up the drinks, I said, "Well, if I've got to, I've got to," and rose, looking past him.

As I rose, I struck quick and hard with my right just to one side of the point of his jaw, hitting with my self as I straightened out, and then again with my right. He fired the guns, but I do not know whether this was merely a convulsive action of his hands or whether he was trying to shoot at me. When he went down he struck the corner of the bar with his head. It was not a case in which one could afford to take chances, and if he had moved I was about to drop on his ribs with my knees; but he was senseless. I took away his guns, and the other people in the room, who were now loud in their denunciation of him, hustled him out and put him in a shed. I got dinner as soon as possible, sitting in a corner of the dining-room away from the windows, and then went upstairs to bed where it was dark so that there would be no chance of any one shooting at me from the outside. However, nothing happened. When my assailant came to, he went down to the station and left on a freight.

**The American Cowboy Today, 1886**

The cow-boy of to-day, especially on the northern ranges, is of entirely different type from the original cow-boy of Texas. New conditions have produced the change. The range cattle business of Kansas, Nebraska, Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, and Dakota is, as already stated, a new business. Those engaged in it as proprietors are chiefly from the States situated east of the Missouri River and north of the Indian Territory. Among them are also many Englishmen, Scotchmen, Frenchmen, and Germans of large means, embracing titled men who have embarked in the business quite extensively. Many of these came to America originally as tourists or for the purpose of hunting buffaloes, but the attractiveness of the cattle business arrested them, and they have become virtually, if not through the act of naturalization, American herds-men. Some of this class have, from the force of romantic temperament and the exhilaration of range life, themselves participated actively in the duties of the cow-boy.

Organization, discipline, and order characterize the new undertakings on the northern ranges. In a word, the cattle business of that section is now and has from the beginning been carried on upon strictly business principles. Under such proprietorships, and guided by such methods, a new class of cow-boys has been introduced and developed. Some have come from Texas, and have brought with them a knowledge of the arts of their calling, but the number from the other State and the Territories constitutes a large majority of the whole. Some are graduates of American colleges, and others of collegiate institutions in Europe. Many have resorted to the occupation of cow-boy temporarily and for the purpose of learning the range cattle business, with the view of eventually engaging in it on their own account, or in the interest of friends desirous of investing money in the enterprise.

**Document Analysis**

1. What similar characteristics of cowboys did you notice in both accounts?
2. How do the two accounts differ in their descriptions of cowboys?
3. How do these descriptions compare to the popular image of cowboys portrayed in film and literature?